

Guidelines for Repertoire Selection

*Issued for 2018 planning
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1 Purpose

This document provides guidance on selection of repertoire for the Maroondah Symphony Orchestra.

An appropriate mix of repertoire will:

1. Provide an enjoyable, stimulating and satisfying experience for all core¹ members of the orchestra.
2. Ensure an enjoyable experience for our audience, both through the repertoire selected and the standard of performance.
3. Provide opportunities for soloists who would not otherwise have the opportunity to perform with a symphony orchestra.
4. Provide opportunities for younger musicians to gain experience alongside more experienced players in a symphony orchestra.

A particular challenge is to ensure a satisfying level of difficulty for all players, given that the typically romantic or modern works that are more attractive to the brass and woodwind are typically more demanding for the strings.

2 Concert types

The orchestra performs a two-year cycle of four programs per year as follows: A,B,B,C,A,B,B,S.
The different concert types are:

Type A Classical

Classical program with a solo concerto and limited use of low brass.

Due to Easter, this program typically has fewer available rehearsals, with two of them being at the end of the previous year. Recruitment of university students is difficult as the university year only starts in March.

Easier repertoire is therefore preferred. The program will typically comprise classical or early romantic works with concerto and limited low brass if required.

This concert is repeated at Cowes, the timing of this performance being preferable due to the warmer autumn weather. Cowes concerts in winter should be avoided if possible.

Use of harp should be avoided, due to possible transport issues.

¹ Non-core members are players of harp and percussion other than tympani. Core members include low brass (trombones and tuba).

Type B Full Brass

Program of works with one major work featuring full brass; other works may include a brass-only piece and/or some low brass as well as a solo concerto. Will often require a harp and extra percussion. If the main work (or equivalent group of smaller works) is difficult, particularly for strings, the other works programmed should be easier to learn and rehearse.

The second B concert is repeated at Cherry Tree.

Students are more available where required for extra parts (particularly harp & percussion during this time of the year).

Type C Choral

Choral concert.

Orchestral requirements vary greatly, from a traditional Messiah (limited classical orchestra) through to Carmina Burana (full romantic orchestra with full percussion). Ideally this should involve all players, including low brass, but it is recognised that this may not always be possible.

Repertoire selection is further complicated by limitations and preferences of the choirs involved.

Type S Special

A (possibly) "special" concert in non-choral-concert years.

Although this could be a conventional overture/concerto/symphony concert, it presents an opportunity to try something different. This could be a program of film music, opera highlights, children's concert or similar. It may not involve a soloist, provided that other aspects make it sufficiently attractive to the audience. It should have significant low brass content, though this is not essential. If limited low brass, the A concert the following year should have increased low brass content if possible.

3 Difficulty and rehearsal considerations

We should aim as far as possible to make all concert programs enjoyable for all those participating. However, as this will not always be possible, the repertoire for a year considered together must provide a satisfying experience for all core players.

Only one major work that is challenging to play should be included on a program. Supporting works should be chosen that require less personal practice (and possibly also less rehearsal) time.

Multiple pieces or movements with prolonged passages may challenge some players' stamina, even though they are not difficult otherwise. This is specifically the case for wind parts.

Programs comprising more than four works are more difficult to rehearse, due to the diverse nature of the works, compared to the movements of a symphony, say, which reflect a similar style and contain significant repetition. Such programs may contain one or two more challenging pieces, but the additional practice and rehearsal time due to the number of pieces needs to be considered.

String section leaders should review the planned pieces for difficulty and bowing requirements, and, where practical, advise section members prior to the start of the rehearsal period. They could also suggest versions to listen to for study.

The Music Director should provide indicative tempo markings prior to the rehearsal period, and develop a rehearsal plan in conjunction with the section leaders (particularly brass to coordinate availability). This will better allow players to focus on difficult parts prior to their rehearsal.

4 Player participation

As part of a subscription-based community orchestra, core members reasonably expect to participate in most or all repertoire. However, to balance the various conflicting requirements, it may periodically be necessary for some players to sit out particular pieces.

Specific requirements and issues are discussed below by section.

4.1 Strings

The current expectation is that all strings participate in all program items. However, it may be appropriate in the future to accommodate some brass or woodwind chamber works in some programs alongside works that are strings-only or that have limited wind. This should be restricted to one or two concerts per year, and no more than one third of a program

This will be particularly acceptable in a program with a major work with difficult string parts.

4.2 Woodwind

Late classical pieces (typically part of Type A concerts), may not require full woodwind, and there are plenty of works for string orchestra that require no wind. Consideration could be given to programming larger wind serenades to compensate for low participation elsewhere in the program. Occasional programming of works with reduced woodwind (e.g. no clarinets), provided that the remaining program items compensate in interest.

4.3 Horns and trumpets

Horns and trumpets are required at least to some extent in most works that also require woodwind. Late classical works may only require two horns and/or no trumpets, although these trumpet parts can also be intermittent and unsatisfying. Inclusion of sufficient works suiting low brass should also cater for the trumpets' requirements. Occasional works with only four horns and/or no trumpets are acceptable, but as far as possible this should be compensated for elsewhere in the program.

4.4 Low brass

Low brass will not be required in all pieces, and in some pieces are required only for limited passages that do not give much satisfaction. In recognition of this, low brass members pay a reduced subscription. However, it is essential that if we are to attract and retain a regular low brass section that we include sufficient music in our programming that is satisfying for them to play. An alternative is to revert to the unsatisfactory approach of recruiting casual players as required.

Proposed requirements:

1. Type B concerts should include as their main work (e.g. a symphony) a piece that has significant satisfying low brass content.
2. Other works in Type B concerts may have lesser (but preferably not zero) brass content, or could include a brass chamber work (e.g. Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man; Gabrieli canzonas etc.). This should require brass to attend most rehearsals, to avoid scheduling issues.
3. Type A concerts may require limited low brass. If that is the case, a limited number of rehearsals should be scheduled specifically involving the brass. It may also be appropriate to include a brass chamber work, though in the absence of other repertoire this is likely to be insufficient by itself.
4. Types C and S concerts could adopt either of the above approaches depending on repertoire.

Two different approaches for rehearsing programs involving low brass are appropriate depending on the program:

1. For programs with substantial content, low brass should be scheduled to attend all (or most) rehearsals. Passages requiring brass rehearsal should be rehearsed first as far as possible.
2. For programs with lesser low brass content, brass can be scheduled to come for specific rehearsals only. However, this requires attendance from all brass players on the same days. Experience has shown that this can be difficult to achieve in practice.

4.5 Percussion

Timpani are in most works we typically play, and can be excused from some rehearsals when involvement is light. Typically works with good low brass content will also have satisfying timpani parts.

Other percussion players are required for some repertoire and should be engaged on a casual basis by the timpanist as required. Involving her students has worked well in the past.

4.6 Harp and orchestral piano

Pieces requiring low brass often also require harp. For obscure reasons (possibly relating to the difficulty of transport of the harp and/or the repertoire), harpists are not available like other amateur musicians. Adults and senior students require a fee, typically as high as \$200 or more per call, which is unaffordable except in exceptional cases. Our recent practice has been to use junior students who are coached by their teacher in the repertoire required. This means that they need the repertoire well in advance, and also that they get busy with exams in the last term. Consequently use of harp should generally be restricted to the two Type B concerts. For a Type C or S, we may need to pay a professional, or use an electronic keyboard substitute if the harp part is small.

Modern works require orchestral piano. Parts can be quite difficult but also intermittent, and require someone who can follow a conductor, not the norm with pianists. It may be necessary to engage a semi-professional (at a reduced rate) as has been done in the past for Carmina Burana. To avoid unexpected high costs, it is important that this is resolved prior to finalisation of any repertoire involving piano.

5 Rehearsal structure

Rehearsals should be structured internally as far as possible in decreasing order of player participation, to minimise the time players spend sitting idle.

A rehearsal schedule should be issued at the beginning of each rehearsal period clearly indicating attendance requirements and which works will be rehearsed to aid personal practice. This may require prior negotiation followed by obtaining specific commitments in order to ensure maximum attendance of those players only required for a limited number of rehearsals.

In general, at least one sectional rehearsal night should be scheduled each period (except possibly for Type C programs). Where appropriate these should include a separate brass sectional rehearsal, or brass may be combined with woodwind. It may also be appropriate to schedule chamber group rehearsals at other times. Other rehearsal rooms are generally readily available at Maroondah Federation Estate, but prior notice (typically a week) is generally required.

6 Score availability

Fortunately, the cost of score hire is less of an issue than in the past, due to the orchestra's currently sound financial position. However, these costs still need to be borne in mind. Many works in copyright (see [guidelines on our website](#)) can only be hired at considerable cost. Scores for works that are out of copyright may be downloaded from IMSLP, though the cost of photocopying and small size of A4 prints may make it preferable to purchase scores. Note that arrangements of modern film scores and similar music can be purchased at reasonable cost, but the arrangements need scrutiny as they may be intended for school orchestras.

In general, it is reasonable to include one or two in-copyright works in a program. However, for more than this, the costs should be checked before committing.

7 Music selection

The Maroondah Symphony Orchestra is constituted as a symphony orchestra “to perform classical orchestral music” under our rules, not a concert or pops orchestra. Therefore, the majority of our repertoire performed should be from the general classical repertoire. However, occasional concerts of lighter works (such as film scores or Gilbert and Sullivan excerpts in the Type S concerts) are quite permissible, as is inclusion of lighter music occasionally in other concerts when appropriate.

Repeat performance of a major work such as a symphony or concerto should not be scheduled more often than once every six years. Minor works such as overtures may repeat every four years.

Soloists are attractive to our audience and one of our objectives under the rules is to “provide opportunities for soloists to perform with a symphony orchestra, particularly when they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do so”. We should therefore aim to program at least three concertos (or similar works with soloist) each year. Typically, in a two year cycle, soloists could comprise two pianists, three string players and one wind player or singer spread sensibly across the two years.

Robert Weiss, President
based on input from the program subcommittee